

Thomas Orchard: Architect and Master Car Builder for the D&H

By S. Robert Powell, Ph.D.

Thomas Orchard was born in Stratton, Cornwall, England, on February 27, 1820, the son of John and Mary (Yeo) Orchard. As a young man, he manifested a strong interest in design and construction, and was recognized locally as a skilled designer and builder.

Longing for a wider field than Cornwall in which to construct his life, he left England in 1840, and set sail for America, landing in Montreal, Canada. After a short time there, he moved to Honesdale, PA, and then, about 1841, to Carbondale where, at that time, James Archbald, assisted by Charles Pemberton Wurts*, was the D&H Chief Engineer. Upon his arrival in Carbondale, Thomas Orchard, age 21, seeking work, would have then presented himself and his credentials to D&H management at the Gravity Shops. That presentation must have been very successful, for Thomas Orchard, age 21, was then hired by the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company as pattern maker and builder in the D&H Shops in Carbondale.

In that capacity, Thomas Orchard and Charles Pemberton Wurts became good friends, and C. P. Wurts recognized and acknowledged Orchard's worth and superior ability by making him superintendent for the building of the many buildings erected under the direction of the D&H at the time. Among the buildings for which Thomas Orchard had the contract were the residences of several leading citizens (J. B. Van Bergen, T. R. Durfee, Eli E. Hendrick) as well as the first Catholic Church in Carbondale, Graded School No. 1, and the Carbondale City Hall that was built in 1860.

In 1862, Thomas Orchard was named Superintendent of the D&H Car Shops, and therein, under his direction, hundreds of "Jimmy" Gravity coal cars (12 feet eight inches long, 4 feet two inches wide, with 18-to-24-inch wheels, 5-ton capacity, and weighing 5,800 pounds) were built in the Carbondale D&H shops. When the Delaware & Hudson commenced the building of passenger coaches in the late 1870s, Thomas Orchard was named Master Car Builder, which was a very high status position in both the D&H and in the community.

On July 4, 1871, the D&H steam locomotive line between Carbondale and Scranton opened. Passenger coaches for use on the line were under construction when the line opened. In the *Carbondale Advance* of June 28, 1873, we read: "**Passenger Car Building.** / R. Manville Esq., Supt. Del. & Hud. R. R. is having some very elegant Passenger Cars got up under the supervision of Thomas Orchard Esq. at their shops in this city. One of them is now ready for use, and is a model of strength and artistic beauty and taste. The panel work, the windows and doors, the upholstering, the ventilators are all beautiful, and skillfully constructed. We believe the work is not surpassed in the best shops in Concord, Troy or Philadelphia."

On June 28, we learn from an article in the July 5 issue of the *Carbondale Leader*, the first of the new passenger coaches was taken for a trial run from Carbondale to Archbald: "Last Saturday afternoon Superintendent Manville and a car load of ladies and gentlemen took a trip as far as Archbald in the new passenger car just manufactured at the shops here. The new car is as easy a one to ride in as anyone could wish for. It is built of the very best material, and is furnished with

first-class seats, and is decorated very tastefully. The ventilation is a great improvement on the old style. Two similar cars are being made at the Company's shops in this city, and the business will probably be carried on permanently. We see no reason why it should not be when such an elegant car as the one spoken of can be turned out." (*Carbondale Leader*, July 5, 1873, p. 3)

Regular passenger service on the Gravity Railroad from Carbondale to Honesdale was instituted on April 5, 1877. All the passenger coaches used on the Gravity Railroad were built in the Carbondale Car Shops under Thomas Orchard's direction. With the exception of metal parts the cars were entirely built by the Delaware and Hudson force, the wheels being purchased from the Van Bergen Foundry in Carbondale.

In the earliest passenger coaches built for the Gravity Railroad, the seats ran lengthwise. Beginning with the coaches built in the autumn of 1877, the seats ran across the car instead of lengthwise. In the *Carbondale Advance* of September 22, 1877, it was noted that these new coaches "will make the road first-class and still more attractive to the traveling public."

As more and more passengers were carried by the Gravity Railroad, it became very clear that additional passenger coaches had to be built. In the *Carbondale Advance* of January 11, 1879, we read: "**New Cars.** / The D. & H. are building in their car shops in this city, two summer coaches for the gravity line between Carbondale and Honesdale, similar in construction to city street cars, given to the summer travel. / The platform upon each end of the cars is small, to be used only by the brakeman in the work allotted him. The sides are to be open, and eight seats arranged in comfortable style, reaching from one side of the car to the other, leaving no aisle in the center as in the common railroad coach. A small platform running the whole length of the car will be arranged for the conductor, upon which he will collect tickets and fares. Each seat will furnish room for six persons, and give them sufficient elbow room. Curtains will be placed upon each coach for use during a time of storm, and other improvements also added for the convenience of the traveling public. / Thomas Orchard, master car builder, has the work in charge, and we are assured it will be well done. / They will put them into use about April first. This must necessarily increase the travel over the mountain, and furnish much enjoyment for excursionists. / This new addition to the attractions of this route, shows Sup't. Manville's determination to make every effort to gratify and serve their patrons and the public."

In 1886, eight new Gravity excursion cars were built in Carbondale; in 1887, six more were built; in 1890, two baggage cars and 6 additional excursion cars (the inside finish was of natural wood-ash, cherry, oak--with canvas headlinings painted and decorated, the exterior painted red with gold striping and lettering; over each journal box a rubber cushion was inserted to absorb shock) were built.

In the Gravity coaches that were built, starting in 1892, Baker heaters were installed. In the *Carbondale Leader* of November 11, 1892, we read: "**NEW GRAVITY COACHES.** / Being Now Turned Out of the Shops in This City. / A new coach, No. 28, is now being run on Conductor Hubbard's narrow gauge train between this city and Honesdale. It is finely finished, and is warmed by a Baker heater, hot water being used, which is carried in pipes along each side of the car, furnishing an equal supply of heat throughout the entire coach. All of the covered cars, in daily use, are to be supplied with similar heaters. / Two new coaches are being built in Master Car

Builder Orchard's shop in this city for use on the Gravity. They will be somewhat longer than the present ones, affording seating capacity for three more passengers." (*Carbondale Leader*, November 11, 1892)

Summary statement on the Gravity Railroad cars built in the D&H Car Shops in Carbondale: "For the Gravity Railroad the D&H Car Shops has built 4 Officer's cars ("Monitor," "Moosic," "Passaic" and "Coach 80"); 9 Passenger cars; 5 Baggage cars, 32 Summer cars and 106 Box and Flat cars. The amount of lumber used annually is about 1,250,000 feet. / The cars built at this shop are a fine as those built anywhere in the United States with exception of palace cars. The inside work is all in native wood and is something of which any city might be proud."

Summary statement, 1890, standard-gauge rolling stock built in the Carbondale car and locomotive shops: "No finer day coaches than those used by the Delaware & Hudson are to be found on any railroad in the country, and they are all built at the Carbondale shops. The first passenger coaches built here were Nos. 5 and 6 and baggage car No. 2. Since 1872, there have been built at this shop for the locomotive road, 30 passenger coaches, 5 combination cars, 4 mail, baggage and express cars, 1 baggage and express car, 41 caboose cars, and 29 flat and baggage cars, besides doing the repairs incidental to the operation of a busy railroad system. / In the locomotive shops, there is some of the most modern and improved machinery to be found. The shop is illuminated by electric light. Since 1887 three passenger and eleven freight engines have been rebuilt here, and fifty engines are now repaired annually. There is an air-brake school here, for the instruction of engineers, equipped with driver and tender brakes, and a train of four cars; also the train whistle's signal."

Given his expertise in car building and his interest in architecture in general, it is not surprising that Thomas Orchard made a trip to his native land, England, in 1851, to visit the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London, and to see, first-hand, Joseph Paxton's Great Exhibition Building (cast iron and plate glass; 1,851 feet long and 128 feet high) in which the exposition was housed.

Thomas Orchard was not only a master builder, but also a master gardener and maintained a greenhouse in Carbondale. In that greenhouse, he had a Night Blooming Cereus (*Selenicereus grandiflorus*), which was a sensation in the community when it blossomed in July 1881. In the *Carbondale Advance* of July 9, 1881, we read: "**Night Blooming Cereus.** / This rare flower is again exhibiting its beauty and fragrance in the greenhouse of Thomas Orchard. There were thirty buds on the plant, nine of which opened on Saturday evening, five on Sunday evening, and six on the night of the fourth. The perfume of so many at one time is too dense for health. It soon creates headache and if closely confined with it, it would suffocate. A little of it is very grateful and appreciated."

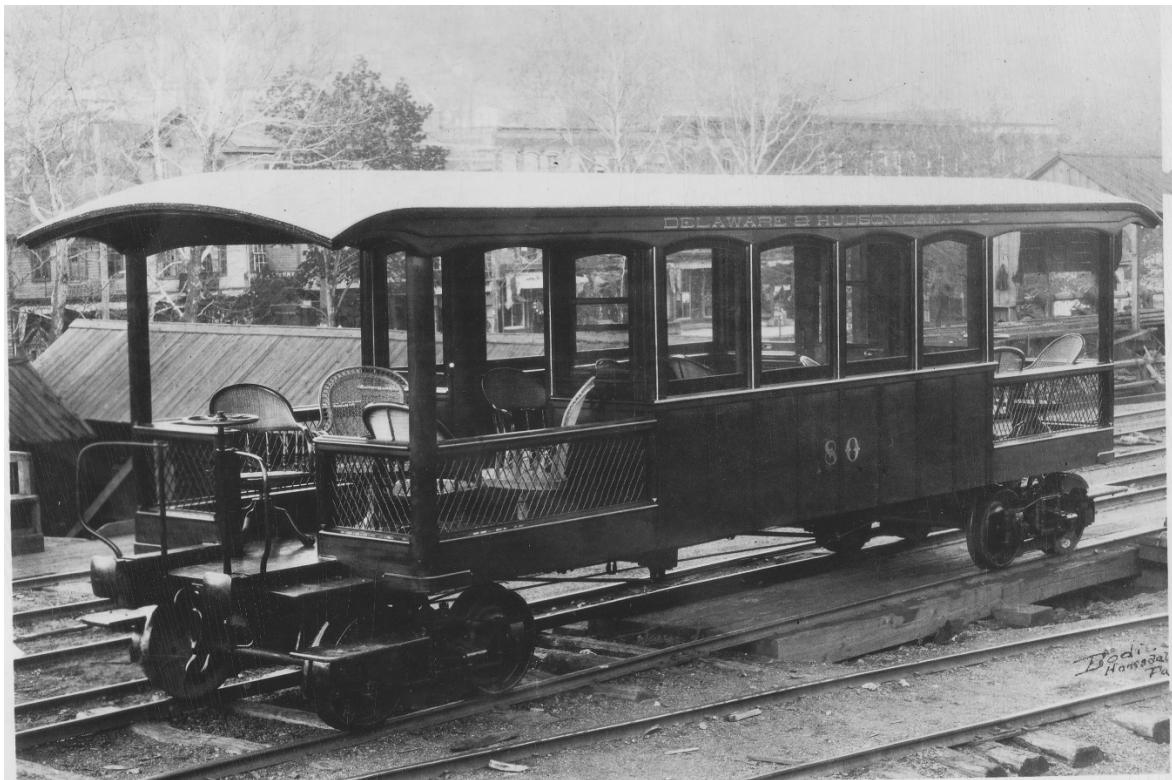
Thomas Orchard—architect, gentleman, and D&H Master Car Builder—died on December 30, 1895. His son, John H. Orchard (who began working in the Carbondale D&H Car Shop in October 1872, and who was promoted to General Car Inspector on April 1, 1886, and who was then promoted to Assistant Master Car Builder on January 1, 1893) succeeded his father as D&H Master Car Builder.

*Charles Pemberton Wurts (nephew and adopted son of John Wurts, third president of the D&H) was one of the sons of George and Abagail Petitt Wurts. He was born in 1824 in Montville, NJ, and began working for the D&H at age 19. He married Laura Jay in 1854. She was a granddaughter of Peter Augustus Jay and the great granddaughter of Supreme Court Justice and diplomat John Jay.

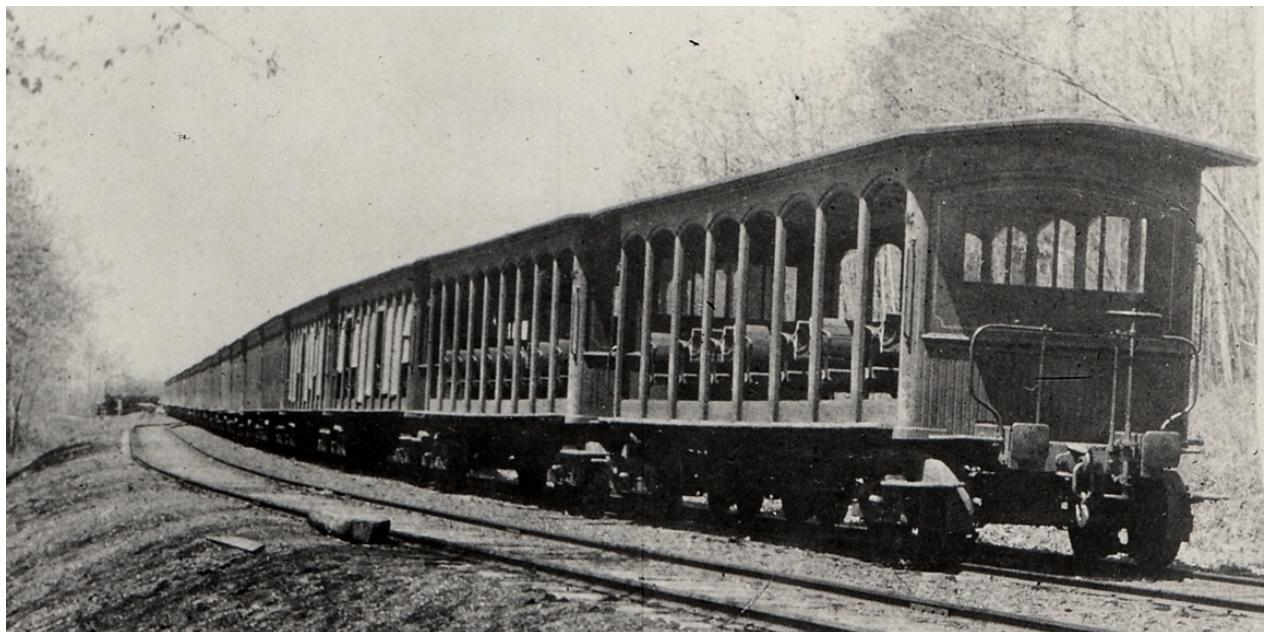
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D&H Car Shops, Carbondale, view of interior. Wearing the straw boater and looking directly at the photographer is Thomas Orchard, D&H Master Car Builder. Photo courtesy of Carbondale Historical Society.



Car No. 80 D&H Gravity Railroad. This is one of four officers' cars that were designed and built under the direction of Thomas Orchard. Photo courtesy of Carbondale Historical Society.



Open-air Passenger Cars, Descending Level 20 on the D&H Gravity Railroad. Photo by Ludolph Hensel, Hawley, PA. Photo courtesy of Carbondale Historical Society.



D&H Passenger Coach (on the left) and a Combination Freight and Passenger Car (on the right) at Union Station, Carbondale, on the D&H Gravity Railroad. Photo courtesy of Bridge Line Historical Society.